

HEERE BIGYNNETH THE MAUNCIPLES TALE OF THE CROWE.

AN Phebus dwelled here in this erthe adoun, As olde bookes maken mencion. He was the mooste lusty bachiler In al this world, and eek the best archer. He slow Phitoun, the

serpent, as he lay Stepyng agayn the sonne upon a day; And many another noble worthy dede Oleyen he koude on every mynstralcie, And syngen, that it was a melodie To heeren of his cleere voys the soun. Certes the kyng of Thebes, Amphicoun, That with his syngyng walled that citee, Koude nevere syngen half so wel as hee. Therto he was the semelieste man That is or was, sith that the world bigan. What nedeth it his fetures to discryve? For in this world was noon so fair on lyve. He was therwith fulfild of gentillesse, Of honour, and of parfit worthynesse.

This Phebus, that was flour of bachilrie, As wel in freedom as in chivalrie, For his desport, in signe eek of victorie Of Phitoun, so as telleth us the storie, Was wont to beren in his hand a bowe.

Now hadde this Phebus in his hous a wyf, Which that he lovede moore than his lyf, And nyght and day dide evere his diligence Hir for to plesse, and doon hire reverence; Save only, if the sothe that I shal sayn, Jalous he was, and wolde have kept hire fayn; for hym were looth byjaped for to be. And so is every wight in swich degree; But al in ydel, for it availleth noght. A good wyf, that is clene of werk and thought, Sholde nat been kept in noon awayt, certayn; And trewely, the labour is in vayn To kepe a shrew, for it wol nat bee. This holde I for a verray nyctee, To spille labour for to kepe wyves; Thus writen olde clerkes in hir tyves. But now to purpos, as I first bigan: This worthy Phebus dooth al that he kan

To plesen hire, wenyng that swich plesaunce And for his manhede and his governaunce, That no man sholde han put hym from hire grace.

But God it woot, ther may no man embrace As to destreyne a thyng, which that nature Hath naturelly set in a creature. Taak any bryd, and put it in a cage, And do al thyn entente and thy corage To fostre it tendrely with mete and drynke Of alle deyntees that thou kanst bithynke, And keep it also clenly as thou may; Although his cage of gold be never so gay, Yet hath this bryd, by twenty thousand fold, Levere in a forest, that is rude and coold, Goon etc wormes and swich wrecchednesse, For evere this bryd wol doon his bisynesse To escape out of his cage, if he may; His libertee this bryd desireth ay.

Lat take a cat, & fostre hym wel with milk And tendre flesch, & make his couche of silk, And lat hym seen a mous go by the wal; Anon he weyvet milk, and flesch, and al, And every deyntee that is in that hous, Swich appetit hath he to ete a mous. Lo, heere hath lust his dominacioun, And appetit fleemeth discrecioun.

A she-wolf hath also a vileyns kynde; The lewedeeste wolf that she may fynde, Or leest of reputacioun, wol she take In tyme whan hir lust to han a make.

Alle these ensamples speke I by this men That been untrew, and nothyng by wommen.

for men han evere a likerous appetit On lower thyng to parfoune hir delit Than on hire wyves, be they never so faire, Ne never so trewe, ne so debonaire, flesch is so newefangel, with meschaunce, That we ne konne in nothyng han plesaunce That sowneth into vertu any while.

His Phebus, which that thoughte Upon no gile, Deceyved was, for al his jolitee; for under hym another hadde shee, A man of litel reputacioun,

Nat worth to Phebus in comparisoun. The moore harm is; it happeth ofte so, Of which ther cometh muchel harm and wo. And so bifel, whan Phebus was absent, His wyf anon hath for hir lemman sent. Hir lemman? certes, this is a knavish speche foryeveth it me, and that I yow biseche.

The wise Plato seith, as ye may rede, The wordmoot nede accorde with the dede. If men shal telle proprely a thyng, The wordmoot cosyn be to the werkynge. I am a boystous man; right thus seye I.

Ther nys no difference, trewely Bitwixe a wyf that is of heigh degree, If of hire body dishoneste she be, And a povre wenche, oother than this, If it so be, they werke bothe amys, But that the gentile, in hire staat above, She shal be cleped his lady, as in love; And for that oother is a povre womman, She shal be cleped his wenche, or his lemman. And God it woot, myn owene deere brother, Men leyn that oon as lowe as lith that oother. Right so, bitwixe a titleles tiraunt And an outlawe, or a theef erraunt, The same I seye, ther is no difference. To Alisaundre toold was this sentence; That, for the tiraunt is of gretter myght, By force of meynnee for to sleen dounright, And brennen hous and hoom, and make al playn, Lo, therfore is he cleped a capitayn; And, for the outlawe hath but smal meynnee, And may nat doon so greet an harm as he, Ne brynge a contree to so greet mescheef, Men clepen hym an outlawe or a theef. But, for I am a man noght textuel, I wol go to my tale, as I bigan.

PHAN Phebus wyf had sent for hir lemman, Anon they wroghten al hire lust volage. The white crowe, that heeng ay in the cage, Bitheld hire werk, and seyde never a word. And whan that boon was come Phebus, the lord, This crowe sang Cokkow! cokkow! cokkow! What, bryd? quod Phebus, what song syngestow?

Ne were thou wont so myrily to syngre That to myn herte it was a rejoyssyngre To heere thy voys? Alas! what song is this? By God! quod he, I syngre nat amys. Phebus, quod he, for al thy worthynesse, for al thy beautee and thy gentillesse, for al thy song and al thy mynstralcye, for al thy waityng, blered is thyn eye With oon of litel reputacioun, Noght worth to thee, as in comparisoun, The montance of a gnat; so moote I thryve! for on thy bed thy wyf I saugh hym swyve. What wol ye moore? The crowe anon hym tolde

By sadde tokenes and by wordes bolde, How that his wyf had doon hire lecherye, hym to greet shame and to greet vileynye; And tolde hym ofte, he saugh it with his eyen.

PHAN Phebus gan awayward for to wryen, And thoughte his sorweful herte brast atwo; His bowe he bente, and sette therinne a flo, And in his ire his wyf thanne hath he slayn. This is the effect, ther is namoore to sayn: for some of which he brak his mynstralcie, Bothe harpe, and lute, and gyterne, and sautrie; And eek he brak his arwes and his bowe, And after that, thus spak he to the crowe:

RAITOUR, quod he, with tonge of scorpioun, Thou hast me broght to my confusioun! Alas! that I was wroght! why nere I deed? O deere wyf! O gemme of lustiheed! That were to me so sad and eek so trewe, Now listow deed, with face pale of hewe, ful gilteles, that dorste I swere, ywys! O rakel hand! to doon so foule amys! O trouble wit! O ire reccheles! That unavyssed smytest gilteles! O wantrust! ful of fals suspicioun, Where was thy wit and thy discrecioun? O every man, bewar of rakelnesse, Ne trowe nothyng withouten strong witnesse. Smyt nat to soone, er that ye witen why, And beeth avysed wel and sobrely, Er ye doon any execucioun Upon youre ire, for suspicioun. Alas! a thousand folk hath rakel ire fully fordoon, and broght hem in the mire. Alas! for sorwe I wol myselfen slee! And to the crowe, O false theef! seyde he, I wol thee quite anon thy false tale! Thou songe whilom lyk a nyghtyngale; Now shaltow, false theef, thy song forgon, And eek thy white fetheres everichon, Ne nevere in al thy lif ne shaltow speke. Thus shal men on a traytour been awreke; Thou and thyn ofspryng evere shul be blake, Ne nevere sweete noyse shul ye make, But evere crie agayn tempest and rayn, In tokenyngre that thurgh thee my wyf is slayn.

And to the crowe he sturte, and that anon, And pulled his white fetheres everichon, And made hym blak, and refte hym al his song, And eek his speche, and out at dore hym slong Unto the devel, which I hym bitake; And for this caas been alle crows blake.

ORDYNGES, by this ensample I yow preye, Beth war, and takeh kepe what I seye; Ne telleth nevere no man in youre lyf How that another man hath dight his wyf; He wol yow haten mortally, certeyn. Daun Salomon, as wise clerkes seyn, Techeth a man to kepen his tonge weel; But as I seyde, I am noght textuel. But natheles, thus taughte me my dame: My sone, thenk on the crowe, a Goddes name; My sone, keep wel thy tonge and keep thy freend. A wikked tonge is worse than a feend. My sone, from a feend men may hem blesse; My sone, God of his endelees goodnesse Walled a tonge with teeth and lippes eke, for man sholde hym avyse what he speke; My sone, ful ofte, for to muche speche, hath many a man been spilt, as clerkes teche; But for a litel speche avysely Is no man shent, to speke generally. My sone, thy tonge sholdestow restreyne At alle tymes, but whan thou doost thy peyne To speke of God, in honour and preyere.

The Maunciples Tale